



**CHILD SAFETY AND SECURITY TIPS**  
SDPD Neighborhood Policing Resource Team  
March 8, 2012

**CONTENTS**

**CARING FOR YOUR CHILDREN IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS**

Basics

When Shopping or in a Public Place

When Moving to a New Neighborhood

When Going to and from School

When Using the Internet and Cell Phones

When Trick-or-Treating on Halloween

**TEACHING YOUR CHILDREN HOW TO BE SAFE IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS**

Basics

When Making 911 Calls

When in Day or Home Care

When Going to and From School

When Out and Away from Home

When Returning Home Alone

When at Home Alone

When Babysitting

**PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN'S IDENTITIES**

**SELECTING A CHILD CARE CENTER OR FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME**

**SELECTING A NANNY OR BABYSITTER FOR HOME CHILD CARE**

**REPORTING CHILD ABUSE**

This paper contains tips on child safety and security for parents and guardians. They are simple, common sense suggestions that will help keep your children from being an easy target for a criminal. They deal with caring for your children in various situations, teaching your children how to be safe in various situations, protecting your children's identities, selecting a child care center or family child care home, selecting a nanny or babysitter for home child care, and reporting child abuse.

Additional tips on home security, vehicle security, vacation safety and security, personal safety and security, senior safety and security, preventing crimes against businesses, preventing fraud and identity theft, reporting crime and suspicious activities, reporting suspicious activities for terrorism prevention, reporting disorder and other problems, obtaining crime information, dealing with homeless people, and starting a Neighborhood Watch program are available in the CRIME PREVENTION AND EDUCATION section of the SDPD website at [www.sandiego.gov/police](http://www.sandiego.gov/police).

**CARING FOR YOUR CHILDREN IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS**

**Basics**

- Know where your children are and whom they are with at all times. Make sure that they return home promptly at appointed times.
- Have them check in with you when they arrive at or depart from a particular location and when there is a change of plans.

- Never let your young children go anywhere alone. Make sure another trusted adult is present if you cannot.
- Make sure your older children, who have more freedom, always go out with a friend and that they fully understand all safety rules.
- Know what your children wear every day. Avoid putting their names on the outside of their clothes. Children may respond more readily to a stranger who calls them by name.
- Never leave your child alone in a vehicle, restroom, store, playground, or other public place.
- Have your child play in a supervised area with friends you know.
- Let your child know where you will be at all times and how to get in touch with you.
- Keep a record of your children's friends and their phone numbers.
- Post a list of important phone numbers near your phone. Include the numbers of your work phone, a neighbor or trusted friend to call for help in a non-emergency, a family member or trusted friend to call in an emergency, family doctor, etc.
- Keep an updated information file on your children. Include pictures, fingerprints, footprints, physical characteristics, identifying marks, medical and dental records, etc.
- Find out why your child doesn't want to be with someone or go somewhere. The reason may be more than a personality conflict or a lack of interest.
- Notice when anyone shows an unusual amount of interest in your child or gives him or her gifts. Ask your child why he or she is acting that way.
- Before leaving your child alone at home make sure he or she is not afraid to be alone and is able to follow your instructions about dealing with various situations that might arise.
- Have a way to contact your children if you will be late in picking them up, meeting them somewhere, coming home, etc.
- Attend your children's activities so you can observe how other adults who are involved interact with them. Talk to the person in charge if you become concerned about anyone's behavior.
- Make time every day to discuss the day's events with your children. Encourage them to tell you about anything that makes them uncomfortable, or scares or confuses them. Listen to what they say and never underestimate their fears or concerns. Show them that you are always concerned about their safety and security. Effective communication is the most important factor in child safety.
- Be alert for any changes in your child's behavior. Look and listen for things that indicate something is troubling him or her. Children are often uncomfortable in disclosing disturbing events or feelings because they are concerned about your reactions to their problems. When they do talk about their problems be calm, compassionate, reassuring, and nonjudgmental as you work with them to resolve the problem.
- Discuss the safety and security tips in this paper with your children in an open, calm, reassuring manner so as not to frighten them. Analyze situations in which they apply and create what-if scenarios to make sure your children understand how to react quickly and appropriately in them.
- Make sure your home is secure with deadbolt locks on outside doors, locked side-yard gates, secondary locks on sliding glass doors and windows, burglar and smoke alarms, etc. Additional tips on controlling access, providing visibility, and maintaining a safe home can be found on the page *Home Security* on the SDPD website at [www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/tips/homesecurity.shtml](http://www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/tips/homesecurity.shtml).
- Report any suspicious persons or activities involving your children to the SDPD on its non-emergency number, (619) 531-2000 or (858) 484-3154.

### **When Shopping or in a Public Place**

- Have your children stay with you at all times. Tell them not to wander off, leave the store, or hide. Don't get distracted by the sights, sounds, and crowds when shopping during holidays.
- Tell them to go to the nearest clerk or person with a nametag and ask for help if they become lost. Show these people to them when entering the store.
- Accompany younger children to restrooms.
- Never leave your child at a video arcade, movie theater, food court, toy store, or mall play area as a convenient "babysitter" while you are shopping. Personnel in those areas are not there to watch children.
- If you allow an older child to go to without you, have him or her go with a friend and set a time for them to return.

## When Moving to a New Neighborhood

- Meet your neighbors and introduce your children to them.
- Take your children on a walking tour of the neighborhood.
- Show them safe places to go if they need help, e.g., neighbor's or friend's homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- Show them places to avoid, e.g., deserted or abandoned buildings, dark or isolated areas, etc.
- Make a map of safe routes to the school, playground, stores, and other places where they would be allowed to go.

## When Going to and from School

- Walk your child to and from school, and point out dangerous spots and safe places to go if he or she needs help.
- Have your child walk or bike to and from school with a friend. There is safety in numbers.
- If your child takes a bus to and from school, visit the bus stop with your child and make sure he or she learns the bus number. Have your child stay with a group while waiting for the bus.
- Ask the school to notify you whenever your child is not in class.
- Make sure that the school will not release your child to anyone but yourself or a person previously designated by you, and that the school will call you back to verify any call saying that some person will come to pick up him or her.

## When Using the Internet and Cell Phones

Although the vast majority of online services and Internet material is legitimate and benign, there have been numerous incidents of children receiving pornographic material, providing personal information under the pretext of possibly winning a prize, or sending money for promised benefits or products. Warning signs of these dangers include excessive late-night computer use, secretive behavior about computer associates, hidden files or directories, and password-protected bios, files, or logical drives.

If you are not familiar with computers, the Internet, and social networking you should visit **www.NetSmartz411.org**, the premiere Internet-safety helpdesk and hotline, to help educate yourself. You should also sit down with your children to have them show you the websites they visit, how they navigate through the Internet, and how they use social networking sites. To better understand the latter you should try networking yourself. This is a great way to connect with your children on computer-related matters.

You should do the following to minimize Internet dangers that your children may encounter:

- Start early. Talk to your children about online behavior, safety, and security as soon as they start using a computer, cell phone, or any mobile device. Supervise closely the choice of websites for young children. Continue to monitor online activities as your children get older and more independent.
- Set reasonable guidelines and time limits for Internet and cell phone use, and social networking. Prohibiting Internet use is not a good idea because it is too easy for children to establish accounts at a friend's house or many other places. But do set time limits on computer use. People, not computers, should be their best friends and companions.
- Keep the computer in the family room or other area where its use can be monitored. Don't allow computers and mobile devices such as laptops and smart phones to be used in your children's bedrooms. And don't allow your children to have separate passwords and log-on names.
- Post clear, simple, easy-to-read rules for Internet use on or near the computer. Discuss these rules with your children and make sure they understand the reasons for them. Visit **www.NetSmartz.org** for examples of rules and safety tips. Your supervision and attention is the best way to protect your children when using the Internet.
- Know what Internet access your children have away from home, i.e., at a friend's home, libraries, schools, and cell phones and other wireless devices, and have a plan to monitor their online activities there as well as at home.

- Initiate conversations with your children about their Internet use. Communicate your values, be patient and persistent, and don't rush through conversations. Encourage your children to come to you with any problems they encounter online.
- Make sure they understand the importance of password and privacy protection, and not to share passwords or log-on names with anyone else. And don't let them use their pet's names as passwords.
- Have your children request your permission to exchange phone numbers or meet another child they have "talked" to online. Consider talking to the other child's parents about a meeting and accompanying your child to the meeting, which should be in a public place. Tell your children that caution is needed because people online are not necessarily who they might seem to be.
- Discourage your children from visiting chat rooms, especially those with video, even if they claim to be child friendly. Persons who would harm children use these websites to entice children.
- Use filtering software to scan for offensive words and phrases in chat rooms and then end the conversations by signing off.
- Install a browser that limits the websites that your younger children can visit to those vetted by educational professionals. Some will send you periodic e-mails that detail you children's Internet activity.
- Install a monitoring service like McGruff SafeGuard. It's free and also scans any chat or text conversations for bad language and other inappropriate communications. Go to **[www.gomcgruff.com](http://www.gomcgruff.com)** for details of this service.
- Have your children promise not to turn off any programs you might install to monitor their computer use.
- Understand how online services work.
- Check the computer's cache and history to see what websites have been accessed.
- Ask your children for their passwords and log-on names, and to share their blogs and online profiles with you. Be aware that they can have multiple accounts on multiple services. Search for you children's identifying information and monitor their screen name(s) and websites for inappropriate content. Also monitor their texts to make sure they are not receiving any threatening or harassing messages, or are sending, receiving, or saving any sexts.
- Learn the meaning of the acronyms your children use in texting. Go to **[www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php](http://www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php)** for a list of acronyms and their definitions, e.g., PAL means parents are listening.
- Make sure your child's screen name does not reveal any identifying information such as name, age, location, school. A screen name should be benign and innocuous, e.g., the first letter of each word in an easily-remembered phrase.
- Prohibit your children from downloading any games, movies, programs, etc., trying to win "free" things, or buying things without your permission.
- Tell your children it's not safe to put photos or any type of personally identifying information on a personal website without privacy settings, even if they promise to give the website address to people they know. Anyone in the world can access such a website. Also, personally identifying information should not be published on a group website or in an Internet yearbook. Group photos are preferable to individual photos only if no names are published.
- Have your children ask permission before listing any adults as "friends" online, even if they are teachers, relatives, or your friends.

Children who use social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace should be warned about online predators and harassers. They should be taught to do the following to prevent and deal with any problems that might arise:

- Never to give out your name, address, phone number, or any other personal information that can identify you. Avoid posting anything that would enable a stranger to find you, e.g., school names. Members' profiles become public information.
- Never say you are home alone.
- Don't post anything that you wouldn't want the world to know, especially anything or language that might embarrass you later, e.g., in applying for college or a job. What's uploaded can be downloaded and passed around by others and be posted online forever. It can't be taken back even if it's deleted from a site.
- Never send out any pictures of yourself, family members, or friends.
- Be careful about adding strangers to your list of "friends." People aren't always who they say they are.
- Come to me to discuss any harassment, hate speech, and inappropriate content you receive.

- Check comments regularly. Ignore and don't respond to any that are mean or embarrassing. Just log off if the harassment bothers you.
- Avoid misleading people into thinking you are older or younger than you are.
- Don't talk about sex or use any sexually explicit language.
- Block people from sending you messages or e-mail, or delete them from your "buddy list" if they harass you.
- Change your password if someone hacks into your profile. Change your username and e-mail address if someone repeatedly bothers you.
- Have me contact the company that runs the site to have any your profile deleted if it was created or altered without your knowledge.
- Talk to me if you are upset about what is being said about you. If you are scared or threatened we will contact a Juvenile Service Team officer at your nearest SDPD area station and inform your Internet Service Provider. Area station addresses and phone numbers are listed in the back of this paper.

Children also need to be given rules for using cell phones and be warned of dangers in their use. Rules should deal with when and where phones can be used, what they can and cannot be used for, and etiquette and safety in texting. You need to set good examples in the use of phones, e.g., not while driving. One thing that phones should not be used for is sexting, i.e., the sending or forwarding of sexually explicit photos, videos, or messages. In addition to risking their reputation and friendships, they could be breaking the law if they create, forward, or even save this kind of message. The following are some good rules for texting.

- Be polite and respect others. Avoid using shorthand that might lead to misunderstandings. Think about how a message might be read and understood before sending it.
- Ignore messages from people you don't know.
- Block numbers of people you don't want to hear from.
- Don't post your cell phone number on the Internet.
- Never provide personal or financial information in response to a text message.
- Use Cc: and Reply all: with care.

Cyberbullying is another problem you should talk to your children about. You should tell them that they can't hide behind the messages they send or pictures they post, and that hurtful messages not only threaten the victim, but they make the sender look bad and can bring scorn from peers. Such messages are also a misdemeanor under California law for which the sender can be punished by up to one year in a county jail, by a fine of not more than \$1,000, or both. Also, you should also make sure your own conduct does not encourage bullying, i.e., that you don't make mean-spirited comments about others or act unkindly to them.

You also need to be prepared to help your children if they become a victim of bullying. You should encourage them to show you any online messages or pictures that make them feel threatened or hurt. If you fear for your child's safety you should call the SDPD on its non-emergency number, **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. Otherwise tell your child not to respond, save the messages and pictures for evidence, and keep you informed. Call the SDPD again if the bullying persists. Here are some other things your child should do:

- Report the bullying to the website or network where it appears.
- Delete the bully from your list of "friends" or "buddies," or block the bully's username or e-mail address.
- Share these measures with a friend who is a victim of bullying. Bullying usually stops quickly when peers intervene on behalf of the victim.

Any suspected online sexual exploitation or attempt by an adult to meet your child should be reported immediately to the San Diego Internet Crimes against Children Task Force at **(858) 715-7100** and the Cyber Tipline at **www.cybertipline.com** or **(800) 843-5678**. The former is the local law-enforcement agency that deals with these matters. The latter is managed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and is mandated by Congress to forward your information to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. If your children or anyone in your home receives pornography depicting children or your children receive sexually explicit images, report the imagery to ICAC and keep it open on your computer until an investigator comes to see

it. Do not copy or download it. In the meantime you can use your computer for other things or turn your monitor off.

Children should also be warned about virus creators, identity thieves, and spammers. These cyber-criminals are increasingly targeting users of social networking sites in an effort to steal their personal data and the passwords to their accounts. One of the tactics they use to gain access to this information involves sending social networking users e-mails that appear to come from online “friends.” For example, some Facebook users have been receiving e-mails from “friends” that claim to contain a video of them. When they click on it they download a virus that goes through their hard drives and installs malware (malicious software). The virus, known as Koobface, then sends itself to all the “friends” on the victim's Facebook profile. A new version of the virus also is affecting users of MySpace and other social networking sites. Cyber-criminals are tricking social networking users into downloading malware by creating fake profiles of friends, celebrities, and others. Security experts say that such attacks, which became widespread in 2008, are increasingly successful because more and more people are becoming comfortable with putting all kinds of personal information about themselves on social networking sites. They warn that users need to be very careful about what information they post because it can be used to steal their identities.

To avoid these problems on social networking sites or anywhere in the Internet, you should warn your children to:

- Not to open any e-mail from an unknown sender. Delete it without opening it. “Drive-by spam” can automatically download malware when an HTML e-mail is opened. You don't have to click on a link or open an attachment to get infected.
- Not to click on any links, videos, programs, etc. provided in messages, even if a “friend” encourages you to click on them.
- Not to visit any sites that promise ways of bypassing parental controls or blocks set up by schools to prevent users from visiting sites such as Facebook. These sites are full of scams, malware, and offers for other services.
- Get program updates directly from the company’s website, not through a provided link.
- Customize your personal privacy settings so only your “friends” have access to the information you post.
- Read your network’s privacy policy regularly to stay informed on how it uses or discloses your information.
- Scan your computer regularly with an anti-virus program. Make sure the program is kept up to date, preferably automatically.
- Be suspicious of anyone, even a “friend,” who asks for money over the Internet.
- Don’t open or forward chain letters. Just delete them. They are nuisances at best and scams at worst. And many contain viruses or spyware.
- Watch out for “free” stuff. Don’t download anything unless it’s from a trusted source and it’s been scanned with security software. “Free” stuff can hide malware.
- Do not buy or download free anti-spyware software in response to unexpected pop-ups or e-mails, especially ones that claim to have scanned your computer and detected malicious software.
- Make sure the pop-up blocker in the tools menu of your browser is turned on. This will prevent most pop-up ads. If you do get one, be careful in getting rid of it. Never click on any of its boxes. By clicking on No or Close you may actually be downloading malware onto your computer. And even clicking on the X in the upper right-hand corner can initiate a download instead of closing the ad. To be safe on a PC, hold down the Ctrl and Alt keys and hit Delete. Then in the Windows Security box click on Task Manger, and then click on End Task. This will clear your screen. Then run a full anti-virus scan.
- Avoid all online games and quizzes that request personal information, including your e-mail address. Providing this information can put your identity at risk.

Additional information on Internet dangers to children and how to keep children safe online is available on numerous websites. These include the following:

- San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force at **[www.sdicac.org](http://www.sdicac.org)**
- National Cyber Security Alliance at **[www.staysafeonline.org](http://www.staysafeonline.org)**
- San Diego County District Attorney at **[www.sdcda.org](http://www.sdcda.org)**. See the Protecting Children Online page under Protecting the Community.
- GetNetWise at **[www.GetNetWise.org](http://www.GetNetWise.org)**

- Federal Bureau of Investigation at **www.fbi.gov**. See *A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety* under Cyber Issues on the Reports and Publications page.
- NCMEC at **www.ncmec.org**. See resources for parents and guardians.
- NET CETERA: Chatting with Kids about Being Online at **www.onguardonline.gov**.
- *Living Life Online* at **http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/livinglifeonline/index.shtm**.

## **When Trick-or-Treating on Halloween**

These tips will help your children have a fun and safe Halloween.

- Have them wear light- or bright-colored clothing, or reflective tape so they can easily be seen.
- Make sure their costumes fit well. Oversized costumes and footwear can cause them to trip and fall.
- Make sure hats can't slide over their eyes, and if they wear masks, that they fit securely and have eye holes that are large enough for full vision.
- If they wear face make-up, apply only nontoxic and hypoallergenic paint or cosmetics.
- Don't let them wear costumes with excessive fabric. Loose clothing can brush up against a jack-o-lantern or other open flame and cause costumes to catch on fire.
- If they carry props such as swords or knives, have them carry flexible ones. Inflexible ones can cause serious injury if they fall on them.
- Younger children should be accompanied by an adult. Attach a tag with their name, address, and phone number to their clothes in case they get separated. It is better if they trick-or-treat during daylight.
- Older children should trick-or-treat with friends. It is more fun and safer. They should carry cell phones and flashlights, have a curfew, tell you where they are going, go only to familiar, nearby neighborhoods, only visit homes with porch lights on, and remain within view from the street.
- Remind your children to stay on sidewalks and otherwise walk facing traffic. And only cross streets at intersections and look both ways before crossing.
- Tell your children not to eat any treats they collect, but to bring them home for you to examine for holes, punctures, etc. Throw away any treats that are homemade or unwrapped.
- If your child has food allergies, read all labels giving them any treats to eat.
- Feed your children a snack or light meal before trick-or-treating so they won't get hungry and sample some treats they collect.
- If any treats look suspicious, call the SDPD on its non-emergency number.

## **TEACHING YOUR CHILDREN HOW TO BE SAFE IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS**

### **Basics**

- Their full name, address, and phone number.
- How to make phone calls within and outside your area code, use **911** in an emergency, and reach an operator.
- How to use a cellular phone.
- Your full name, exact name of your place of work, work phone number, and any pager or cell phone number you have.
- The names of the streets and landmarks in your neighborhood.
- Be alert to and aware of your surroundings. Escape routes and safe places to go if they need help
- Never to give out any personal information that can identify them.
- Tell you about anything unusual or suspicious that bothers them, or if anyone approaches or touches them in any way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Take advantage of situations in which you are out with your children to point out dangers and teach safety skills
- Trust their instincts. If something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't. They have the right to say NO if they sense something is wrong.
- How to do basic first aid.

## **When Making 911 Calls**

- Never say "nine eleven." There is no eleven on a telephone keypad or dial. Always say "nine-one-one."
- Always call from a safe place. If there is a fire in the house, get out first and then call.
- Post your address near the phone.
- Never call **911** as a prank or joke. You can get into trouble and keep someone who really needs help from getting it in time.
- Call **911** if you think you have an emergency and explain the situation to the dispatcher.
- If you call **911** by mistake, don't hang up. Explain the mistake to the dispatcher and say there is no emergency.
- **911** is not for animal emergencies. Call your vet or the County Department of Animal Control at **(619) 236-2341**.

## **When in Day or Home Care**

- Say NO when anyone asks you to do something painful, embarrassing, or wrong. Do not be tempted by gifts or candy, or be compelled by threats.
- Not allow anyone to touch the parts of your body covered by your bathing suit. And don't touch anyone else's body in those places.
- Do not remain alone with an adult in a bathroom, office, bedroom, closet, or other isolated place.
- When in a bathroom, do not allow anyone to too much time watching you or fixing your clothes. And never touch bodily wastes or blood.

## **When Going to and From School**

- Avoid shortcuts, deserted or abandoned buildings, and dark or isolated areas.
- Turn around and run to the nearest safe place if a person appears to be following them on foot, or a vehicle slows or stops by them. Run away from danger, never toward it. Safe places would be neighbor's or friend's homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- Not to hitchhike or accept a ride from anyone unless you have told them it is OK in each instance. Tell them to say NO and run away to a safe place if offered a ride by a stranger.
- Never to leave school with anyone they don't know. Establish a simple code word to be used if someone your children don't know comes to pick them up. Remind them about the word periodically and tell them not to accept a ride or go anywhere with anyone who does not know the code word. Stress that this word must be kept secret.

## **When Out and Away from Home**

- Play with others, not alone.
- Teach the difference between a stranger who may be a danger and one who may be helpful, e.g., in an emergency rescue situation. The simple "stranger-danger" message is inappropriate and misguided because the danger to children is much greater from someone who is not a stranger.
- Say NO to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touching or actions by others and to get out of these situations as fast as possible. If avoidance is not possible tell them to make a big scene by screaming, yelling, kicking, and resisting. Their safety is more important than being polite.
- Not to get in a vehicle or go anywhere with a person without your permission.
- Not to respond just because a person tries to start a conversation.
- Stay away from any adult who asks for help, e.g., "Can you help me find my dog?" or asks for directions (an adult should ask another adult, not a child for help), or tries to get you to go somewhere with them, e.g., "Your mom's hurt and she told me to come get you."
- How to use a pay phone to call 911 in an emergency. Be sure to say that they don't need to put in any money.
- Not to let anyone take their picture and tell you if someone asks.
- Not to accept gifts or money from strangers. Have them tell you if anyone offers them gifts or money. Be alert for any new things they acquire.
- Not to be out alone at night.



- Not to go into anyone else's home without permission.
- If they get lost, remain where they first became lost and wait for a rescue. Make noise by yelling or some other means of attracting attention. Go to the nearest safe place if necessary.

### **When Returning Home Alone**

- Carry his or her house key in a secure hidden place. Leave an extra key with a neighbor or trusted friend and tell your child where it will be if it's needed.
- Not to enter the home if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway. Go to a neighbor's home and call **911**.
- Turn off the burglar alarm.
- Lock the door immediately after entering and make sure the home is secure.
- Check in with you after arriving home to let you know that he or she has arrived safely.

### **When at Home Alone**

- How to answer the door and when not to answer it. Never open the door to a stranger or let an uninvited neighbor or acquaintance into your home.
- How to use caller ID. How to respond if someone calls on the phone.
- Not to tell a caller that you are not at home. Have your child say you cannot come to the phone, ask the caller to leave a message, and say you will call back.
- If your child cannot take a message tell him or her not to answer the phone.
- To keep all doors and windows locked and how to unlock them in an emergency.
- Which appliances can be used and how to use them. Leave written instructions.
- Who to call, what to say, and where to go in an emergency, and what constitutes an emergency, e.g., a fire, gas leak, smoke, etc.
- Who to call, what to say, and where to go in a non-emergency, and how they differ from emergencies.
- About all the safety and security features of the home, including smoke and burglar alarms, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, outside lights, etc.
- How to get out quickly in case of fire.
- What to do if they smell smoke or gas.
- What to do during an electrical storm and a power outage.
- To follow a schedule you set for homework, chores, TV watching, computer use, etc.
- When to leave the house.
- When to invite a friend or friends over.
- When to use the phone.

### **When Babysitting**

- Know your employer. Only work for people you or your parents know, or for whom you have a good personal reference.
- Give us your employer's name, address, phone number, and where he or she is going and when he or she expects to be home.
- Have your employer show you all the safety and security features of the home, including smoke and burglar alarms, telephones, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, door and window locks, outside lights, etc.
- Keep all doors and windows locked while inside. Leave an outside light on after dark. Keep drapes or blinds closed at night but leave some lights on.
- Keep front door locked if you are out in the back yard or in a common play area.
- Follow the same security principles you use at home in answering the door or the phone.
- Don't say you are alone and babysitting when answering the door or phone. Say you are visiting and that you will take a message for the parents.
- Hold hands with the children when walking. When walking along a street, keep between the children and the street.

## PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN'S IDENTITIES

- Provide your child's Social Security numbers only when it is required by a government agency or financial institution. Never provide it for identification.
- Carry your child's Social Security number or card in your purse or wallet only when you know you will need it.
- Teach your children never to give out personal information over the phone or on the Internet.
- Check to see if any of your children have a credit report by visiting **www.AnnualCreditReport.com** or calling **(877) 322-8228**, a service created by Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion, the three nationwide consumer-reporting companies. No report should exist unless someone has applied for credit using your child's Social Security number. No minor should have a credit report. At a FTC-sponsored forum on child-centric fraud in July 2011 it was estimated that more than 140,000 American children become victims of identity theft each year. By various means thieves obtain children's SSNs and sell these genuine numbers to persons with poor credit ratings who obtain credit cards, make extensive purchases, and don't pay their bills. If this happens you should contact the credit card companies and the three nationwide consumer credit reporting bureaus immediately.
- Watch your children's mail for credit card applications, bills, or bank statements. They are signs that someone has started a credit history in your child's name.
- Request that banks in which your children have accounts remove their names from marketing lists.
- Report any suspected identity theft to the three nationwide consumer reporting companies and obtain copies of any credit reports in your child's name and Social Security number. If your child does have a credit report ask to have all accounts, application inquiries, and collection notices removed immediately. Tell the credit issuer that the account is in the name of your minor child who by law isn't permitted to enter into contracts.
- Take advantage of your rights under the federal Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). This law requires websites to get parental consent before collecting and sharing information from children under 13. COPPA covers sites designed for children under 13 and general audience sites that know certain users are under 13. It protects information that websites collect upfront and information that children give out or post later. It also requires these sites to post a privacy policy that provides details about the kind of information they will collect and what they might do with the information. You should: (1) know your rights, (2) be careful with your permission, (3) check out the sites your children visit, (4) review the sites' privacy policies, (5) contact the site if you have any questions about its privacy policy, and report any site that breaks the rules to the FTC at **www.ftc.gov/complaint**. For answers to frequently asked questions about the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule go to **http://www.ftc.gov/privacy/coppafaqs.shtm**.

## SELECTING A CHILD CARE CENTER OR FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME

The majority of child care centers, including preschools, and family child care homes in California must be licensed by the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services if they care for children from more than one family not related to the licensee. Child care programs that are exempt from licensing are those on public school sites, Federal property, or at a private elementary school that cares for more than 95 percent of its own children.

This licensing is designed to ensure that facilities provide a safe and healthy environment for children in day care. A licensed facility will meet the CCLD's standards for admission policies, daily practices and procedures, emergency plans, facility design and structure, indoor and outdoor space, equipment, nutrition, background clearances, staff qualifications, and adult-staff ratios. You should call the Division's Mission Valley Regional Office at **(619) 767-2200** to see if a child care facility in San Diego County you are considering meets these licensing requirements. You should also request to see the licensee's facility file which will contain information from evaluation visits conducted by the Division and any complaints against the facility that were substantiated by the Department. Child care centers are inspected annually, while family child care homes are inspected prior to being licensed and every three years thereafter.

You can get assistance in finding quality care for your child from the YMCA Childcare Resource Service by calling **(800) 481-2151** and asking to speak to a child care consultant. Information on this and other services provided by the Service can be found on its website at **www.ymcacrs.org**. Before making a final selection of a child care center

or home you should visit several more than once and follow the 5 Steps to Quality Child Care under For Parents and Looking for Child Care on this website. They are Look, Listen, Count, Ask, and Be Informed.

A great deal of information for parents looking for child care is also available on the California Department of Social Services Child Care Licensing website at <http://www.cdld.ca.gov/PG411.htm>. It will answer the following questions:

- What types of licensed child care are available?
- How can I find a child care facility for my child?
- How do I choose a day care that's right for my child?
- What should I consider when looking for child care?
- What should I look for if my child is an infant?
- What should the facility provide for my child?
- What should I look for in regard to basic health and safety practices?
- What should I discuss with the day care provider?
- What will the provider need from me in order to enroll my child?
- How can I ensure a positive child care experience?
- What rights do parents have?
- What should I do if I have a concern regarding a provider?
- How can I file a complaint against a facility?
- How can I get help with day care costs?
- Where can I find information on child health and safety?

## **SELECTING A NANNY OR BABYSITTER FOR HOME CHILD CARE**

Before entrusting your child to a nanny or babysitter you should check each candidate's references and work history, and then make sure he or she is registered with TrustLine by calling **(800) 822-8490** and providing the candidate's full name and driver's license number. It's that easy and it's free.

TrustLine is a database of nannies and babysitters that have cleared criminal background checks in California. It's the only authorized screening program of in-home caregivers in the state with access to fingerprint records at the California Dept. of Justice and the FBI. It was created by the California Legislature in 1987 to give parents an important tool to use in selecting a caregiver for their children. It is administered by the California Department of Social Services and endorsed by the California Academy of Pediatrics. All child-care providers registered with TrustLine have submitted their fingerprints to the California Dept. of Justice and have no disqualifying criminal convictions in California. TrustLine also examines the California Child Abuse Central Index for substantiated child abuse reports and verifies the applicant's identification number with the California Department of Motor Vehicles or the Immigration Naturalization Service. Since 1999 applicants also received a clearance from an FBI criminal record check. All employment agencies are required to use TrustLine. Thus nannies and sitters obtained through an agency will either be registered or in process of being registered. If a candidate you are interviewing is not registered tell him or her to call TrustLine at **(800) 822-8490** or go to its website at [www.trustline.org](http://www.trustline.org) for information on how to register.

The TrustLine website also contains a set of tips on choosing a child-care provider. It lists questions to ask and things to do after selecting a good caregiver. The latter include the following:

- Set up clear job responsibilities.
- Continually assess how the arrangement is working.
- Drop in unannounced at random times to time to see how your child is doing.
- Leave emergency contact information.
- Call TrustLine periodically to make sure your caregiver is still registered. It is updated continually and caregivers who have committed a disqualifying crime subsequent to their clearance are removed.
- Ask your child how he or she is getting along with the caregiver.

The following additional tips deal with relations with a caregiver:

- Fire any caregiver provided by an agency who offers to work independently for less.
- Notify the agency immediately if you have any concerns about the caregiver it provided.
- Lock up all financial records, checkbooks, credit cards, personal ID information, etc.
- Do not allow the caregiver to have access to the home computer.
- Do not lend money to the caregiver.
- Supply a limited amount of cash for necessities and require receipts and an itemized accounting of all expenditures.

In hiring a caregiver privately seek referrals from a trusted source first. If possible avoid using a “help wanted” ad. And do not respond to an ad by a person seeking employment as a caregiver. Interview all prospective caregivers. For your safety, do it in a public place, e.g., a coffee shop, not at your home. And don’t give out your home address. Ask the applicant to do the following:

- Fill out an employment application that asks for personal information, education, employment history, applicable licenses and certificates, personal references, etc.
- Provide proof of citizenship or legal residency, a state-issued photo ID, and a Social Security card.
- Provide his or her driver’s license number and automobile insurance policy information if driving is involved.
- Register with TrustLine.
- If the applicant is not already registered and refuses to apply, and you want to conduct a background investigation to verify personal information that is not a matter of public record, e.g., education, credit, and medical records, you should ask the applicant to sign an investigation authorization form. For the investigation you can hire a private investigator or do it yourself. You can find an investigator in San Diego on the California Association of Licensed Investigators’ website at [www.cali-pi.org](http://www.cali-pi.org). The authorization form will be provided by the investigative agency. The investigator would check criminal, civil, and credit records, the applicant’s driving history, the applicant’s Social Security number, etc.

If you decide to do the investigation yourself you should first check the applicant’s employment history and personal references. Then you should check the public records of criminal and civil court cases in San Diego County in the past 10 years. They are available at the following four locations:

Central District	330 W. Broadway	San Diego	92101	<b>(619) 615-6358</b>
East County Dist.	250 E. Main St.	El Cajon	92020	<b>(619) 441-4461</b>
North County Dist.	325 S. Melrose Dr.	Vista	92083	<b>(760) 726-9595</b>
South County Dist.	500 3rd Ave.	Chula Vista	91910	<b>(619) 691-4439</b>

You should also call the San Diego County Courthouse at **(619) 544-6401** to find out whether there are any outstanding San Diego County warrants on the applicant. All you need is his or her first and last name and birth date. Warrant information is available to the public and it’s free. A search of outstanding San Diego County warrants can also be made on the County Sheriff’s web site at [www.sdsheriff.net](http://www.sdsheriff.net). Just click on Warrant for Arrest. For records of cases and warrants in other counties you must contact the court clerks and sheriffs in those counties.

And be sure to check the local and national sex offender registries. Information on registered sex offenders in California is available on Megan’s Law website at [www.meganslaw.ca.gov](http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov). You can search by name, address, city, ZIP code, county, parks, and schools, and obtain a map of approximate offender locations, or a list of offender names. The latter also provides pictures and personal profile information on the offenders. Although this information is updated frequently, its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Offenders may have moved and failed to notify local law enforcement agencies as required by law; thus, the locations of offenders without established addresses are not included. And remember that not all sex offenders have been caught and convicted, and that most sex offenses are committed by family, friends, or acquaintances of the victim. You can also click on the links on the left of the home page to learn how to protect yourself and your family, facts about sex offenders, and sex offender registration requirements in California, and to obtain answers to frequently asked questions. You should also check the U.S. Department of Justice’s National Sex Offender Public Website at [www.nsopw.gov](http://www.nsopw.gov).

## REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Call the County Social Services Department's Child Protective Services Child Abuse Hotline at **(858) 560-2191** or **(800) 344-6000** to report situations in which you suspect that a child has been abused or appears to be at risk of being abused. Your report will be investigated and steps will be taken to protect the child and preserve the family unit. The SDPD will be informed if abuse is involved. If you know that abuse has occurred, you should call SDPD directly at **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. If the abuse is in progress you should call **911**. Officers will investigate, take steps to protect the victim and prosecute the abuser, and inform the County Social Service Department.

The following are some signs of child abuse:

- Frequent or unexplained injuries
- Injuries that appear to have a pattern such as marks from a hand or belt
- Sexual language, knowledge, interest, or behavior beyond what is normal for the child's age
- Specific comments or complaints about abuse
- Lack of basic needs for food, clothing, and medical care
- Poor hygiene
- Sudden decline in school performance or frequent truancy
- Lack of supervision for long periods of time
- Excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong
- Always watchful and on alert as if waiting for something bad to happen
- Shies away from touches, flinches at sudden movements, or seems afraid to go home
- Changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying
- Bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances
- Avoids undressing or wears extra layers of clothing
- Sudden acting out of feelings or aggression, rebellious behavior
- Regression to infantile behavior
- Acts inappropriately adult, e.g., taking care of other children
- Pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in private areas
- Fear a certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people.

### SDPD AREA STATIONS

Central	2501 Imperial Ave. SD 92102	(619) 744-9500
Eastern	9225 Aero Dr. SD 92123	(858) 495-7900
Mid-City	4310 Landis St. SD 92105	(619) 516-3000
Northeastern	13396 Salmon River Rd. SD 92129	(858) 538-8000
Northern	4275 Eastgate Mall SD 92037	(858) 552-1700
Northwestern	12592 El Camino Real SD 92130	(858) 523-7000
Southeastern	7222 Skyline Dr. SD 92114	(619) 527-3500
Southern	1120 27th St. SD 92154	(619) 424-0400
Western	5215 Gaines St. SD 92110	(619) 692-4800